

Lesson 1: Ten Signs of True Discipleship

Intro

What do we mean when we talk about discipleship? When we take a look at the life and ministry of Jesus we see that discipleship went hand in hand with His work. Right from the start He called individuals to follow Him so that they could become His disciples. He also trained and commissioned them to make disciples of other people.

Even today, discipleship is Jesus' main focus. For this reason He serves as our heavenly High Priest and Mediator. His main invitation is for people to become His disciples. His main commission to Christians is to make disciples of others. Discipleship in reality is the foundation of Jesus' church because without it His church would not be able to survive. For this reason, discipleship isn't just an important topic among others. It is a foundational truth that all other topics are built upon. Therefore, we can only hope to understand biblical teachings, regardless if they are doctrinal or practical aspects of faith and church life, when they are viewed through the eyes of discipleship.

The goal of this course is not to lead you through a theoretical study of discipleship. Rather, the goal is to help you personally grow in your discipleship to Christ. What does that mean? It means that you learn how to follow Jesus in your personal life by learning and practicing the principles that Jesus taught His disciples. Furthermore, and crucially important, that you help others become devoted disciples of Jesus Christ.

What is a disciple?

The Greek word *mathētēs* means *pupil* or *student*. It is a word frequently used in the New Testament and it describes a conscious decision to follow a teacher or a group. Basically, in ancient times a disciple was like an apprentice. They were taught the trade, lived with the family of the teacher, and even went to worship services with them. With this in mind, it is easier to understand the disciples question to Jesus: "Teacher, where are you staying?" (See John 1:38)



Mark

3:13-15

The New Testament often uses the word *disciple* for the 12 apostles. Read Mark 3:13-15 and list the three important signs of discipleship that made the 12 men that Jesus called His disciples.

- a.) _____
- b.) _____
- c.) _____

These three points are important and help us understand today what it means for us to be a disciple of Jesus. Being a disciple of Jesus means:

- Being called by Jesus,
- Being with Him,
- Being empowered and sent out by Him to preach the Gospel.

It's important to note that the New Testament word for *preach* is not limited to the act of preaching sermons. It simply means to proclaim or to make known what happened during a particular situation. Thus preaching also includes sharing our personal testimony. Therefore it is applicable to all, even those who do not feel called to preach a sermon.

In the wider sense, the word *disciple* referred to anyone who followed Jesus. In the book of Acts, the word *disciple* is used to describe those who chose to follow Christ with all their heart. In this sense all believers are disciples of Jesus Christ. But in the most

First Sign A disciple of Jesus is called to fellowship with Him.

Jesus describes Himself as the vine and His disciples as the branches. Of course, they can only live if they are connected to Him. In the parable, which expression is repetitively used to describe what fellowship with Jesus is like?

Verse 4: _____

Verse 5: _____

Verse 6: _____

Verse 7: _____

Verse 9: _____

Verse 10: _____

Jesus clearly describes that we can abide in Him and that He wants to abide in us.

What are the consequences if we are not in fellowship with Him?

Verse 2: _____

Verse 4: _____

Verse 5: _____

Verse 6: _____

First of all, discipleship is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Without this relationship everything else is meaningless. I could have an intimate knowledge of all of the Adventist beliefs and be able to explain them with clarity, my lifestyle could be a shining example, my energies for the Church could be 110%, but without a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, all of it would be worthless. The moment we reduce our Christian life to a list of norms and intellectual knowledge, we miss the goal that Jesus has called us to -- a personal relationship with Him.

Quote #1 “‘Abide in Me, and I in you.’ Abiding in Christ means a constant receiving of His Spirit, a life of unreserved surrender to His service. The channel of communication must be open continually between man and his God. As the vine branch constantly draws sap from the living vine, so are we to cling to Jesus, and receive from Him by faith the strength and perfection of His own character.” (*The Desire of Ages*, pg. 676)

Second Sign A disciple has experienced forgiveness of sins and justification by faith.

How does Jesus describe this idea in verse 3?

A person can only become a disciple after they have experienced salvation through Jesus Christ. Our belief in Jesus Christ as Savior is the key, the foundation of discipleship.

Third Sign **A Disciple of Jesus bears fruit. Through his life and words the believer testifies to the changing power of Jesus Christ.**

Jesus says this multiple times in this parable. Write down the main statements in regard to this sign below.

Verse 2: _____

Verse 4: _____

Verse 5: _____

Verse 8: _____

Jesus describes here a spiritual “natural” law. When we are separated from Him, we can do nothing. But when we are connected to Him, the natural result is an abundance of good fruit. Let’s not forget that the good fruit isn’t the result of our doing. It’s much more than that. It is the result of us abiding in Him and He in us. This is the only way we can bear good fruit. This growth happens as naturally as a growing tree, but not because we are straining to produce the fruit ourselves.

The fruit that God wants us to bear is reflected in our character. He wants to restore in us His image, which was lost as a result of Adam’s sin, so that our character reflects His character. The Bible calls this transformation *sanctification* (see Galatians 5:22,23; Romans 6:22; and Colossians 1:10).

Quote #2 “When we live by faith on the Son of God, the fruits of the Spirit will be seen in our lives; not one will be missing.” (*Desire of Ages, pg. 676*)

But the “fruit” is not limited to our character. It also represents the people we lead to Jesus. In short, those we disciple. Every disciple of Jesus is called to share the gospel with others (see John 4:35-38; Matthew 28:18-20).

Fourth Sign **A disciple of Jesus lives according to the word of God.**

How does Jesus share this thought in verse 7?



In the following texts how does Jesus describe the relationship between His word and our discipleship?

John 8:31-32: _____

John 17:17: _____

A disciple of Jesus studies daily and meditates on the word of God. They take God's word seriously and use it as the standard in their life. God's word strengthens, encourages, reprimands, admonishes, and comforts them. It is the source of their spiritual growth.

Fifth Sign A disciple of Jesus lives a life of prayer.

What does Jesus say about prayer in verse 7?

Sixth Sign A disciple of Jesus is obedient to God's commandments.

How does Jesus describe the connection between our relationship to him and our obedience to His commandments in verse 10?

Following Jesus in a practical way means that we are obedient to Him. We have decided to accept Jesus not only as our Savior but also as the Lord of our life. When we are obedient to Jesus we intentionally place Him at the head of our life. We surrender and give Him complete Lordship over every aspect of our lives. When Christ is accepted as Lord over every aspect of our lives, then He can live in us through the Holy Spirit.

Seventh Sign A disciple of Jesus is called to fellowship with other disciples.

What does Jesus say about fellowship in verse 12?

Of course, the parable of the vine and the branches teaches us that we must all abide in Christ as individuals. But it also speaks of fellowship with others. When speaking, Jesus was addressing His disciples as a whole. After all, it would be a very strange vine that has only one branch. The point is that Jesus places His disciples in a fellowship that is called to prepare the world for His second coming. The more we keep the reality of Jesus' second coming before us, the more we will unite and seek to fulfill the work Jesus gave to us as a body. A disciple of Jesus is not alone in this work.

How do the following texts describe the meaning of fellowship for a disciple of Jesus?

John 13:35: _____



John 17:20-23: _____

Eighth Sign A disciple of Jesus lives for the glory of God.

According to Jesus' words, what is a result of our discipleship? (Verse 8)

A disciple of Jesus does not live to bring glory to self. From the bottom of their heart, through their life and being, they want to bring glory to God. In the controversy between Christ and Satan, Satan was constantly portraying God's character in a false light in order to make God unattractive. Jesus came to show mankind the true character of God. "He who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9). As disciples of Christ we are called to continue the work that Jesus started. Through our lives and work we demonstrate who God really is and prove that Satan's accusations are nothing but lies.

Quote #4

"God desires to manifest through you the holiness, the benevolence, the compassion of His own character. Yet the Saviour does not bid the disciples labor to bear fruit. He tells them to abide in Him....The life of Christ in you produces the same fruits as in Him. Living in Christ, adhering to Christ, supported by Christ, drawing nourishment from Christ, you bear fruit after the similitude of Christ." (*Desire of Ages*, pg. 677)

Ninth Sign A disciple of Jesus is called to lead a life of joy.

According to Jesus' words, what is another result of our discipleship? (Verse 11)

The lives of Jesus' disciples are not always comfortable. Jesus makes it clear that there will be sacrifice and deprivation. Following Him means giving up many things that the world considers to be fun and exciting because these things damage one's relationship with God. But this does not mean that Jesus wants His disciples to live a gloomy life. The biggest joy that we can and will experience in this world is when we follow Jesus wholeheartedly. Everything else in this world that is considered fun and exciting is only a poor imitation.

Tenth Sign A disciple of Jesus has made a clear, 100% decision for discipleship.

The picture of the vine and the branches makes one thing clear: either the branch is connected to the vine or it is not. That means that we are disciples of Jesus or we are not. Discipleship is a clear, 100% committed, and well thought out decision. Jesus made that clear many times in His word as He explained to people what it meant to be His disciple.

These ten signs show the plan God has for us. Each one of these signs is so important that we will look at them again in a deeper way as we go through this discipleship course. If you take a look at the other lessons from this discipleship course you will see that each topic has something to do with at least one of the ten signs.

Where do you stand?

On the following pages you will find a list of questions that will help you determine the quality of your relationship with Christ. The intention of this list is not to reduce your faith to a checklist or a catalog of rules. Neither should it be a discouragement to you because you find many areas that you feel a need to change. Please do not compare yourself with others nor their walk in Christ. These questions should help you to reflect on where you stand today and where you need to draw closer to Christ. Go through the questions and mark the areas where you desire a change. This discipleship course will address all these questions and offer you assistance.

| | Applies ... | Does not apply |
|--|---------------------|----------------|
| 1. I have daily quiet time with God. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 2. I have the assurance that my sins are forgiven and that through God's grace I am saved. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 3. I try to live a disciplined life. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 4. I read the Bible daily. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 5. Every week I memorize a new Bible text. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 6. I have the habit of taking notes whenever I hear or read God's word. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 7. I have a regular prayer time. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 8. I have a prayer list and pray regularly for the people and petitions on this list. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 9. I have experienced a clear answer to prayer in the last four weeks. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 10. My daily prayers include worship, thanksgiving, confession, requests, and supplications. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 11. I try to live in peace with fellow believers in Christ. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 12. I have forgiven people who hurt me. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 13. I am prepared to make the first step toward reconciliation. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 14. I experience, with God's help, the victory over temptations. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 15. I live in harmony with my family. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 16. I pray regularly for lost people by name. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 17. I take an active role in a missionary-oriented Bible study group. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 18. I know that God has called me to lead others to Christ. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 19. I share my testimony whenever a fitting opportunity arises. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |
| 20. I talk about God regularly with people who are open. | 0-----0-----0-----0 | |

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21. I help people who I have won for Christ, to grow in their faith and to live as disciples for Jesus. 0-----0-----0-----0
22. I train others so that they can train others to live their lives as Jesus' disciples. 0-----0-----0-----0
23. I know my spiritual gifts and use them in the church. 0-----0-----0-----0
24. I faithfully pay my tithe and give free-will offerings to God. 0-----0-----0-----0
25. I have life goals that I constantly think about and work towards. 0-----0-----0-----0

